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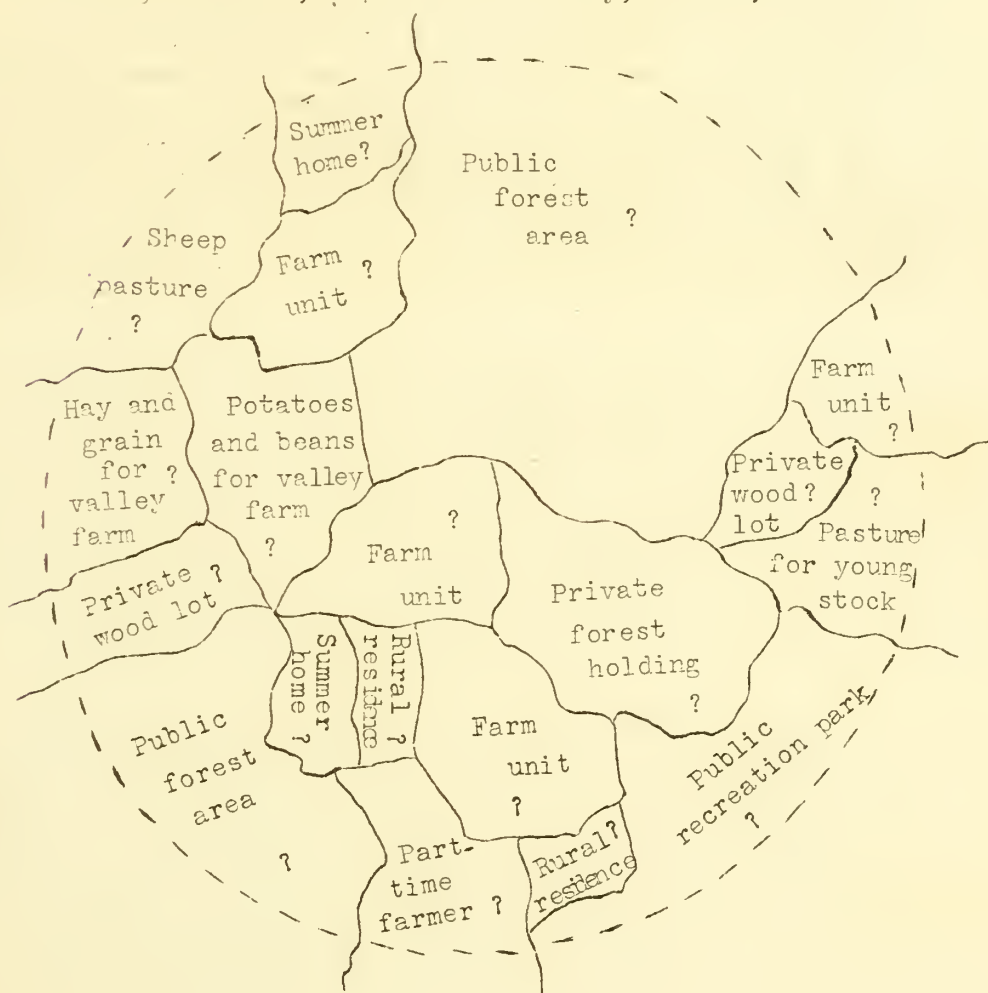
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SOME TRENDS IN LAND CLASSES I and II

An Analysis of Two Areas in Southern New York

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What pattern of uses will give these areas stability?

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FOREWORD

As a result of numerous studies made over a period of years, the conditions which prevail in many of the high-elevation areas of southern and central New York are well known. The abandoned homes, the idle farm land, the repeated attempts of new families to try again for the satisfactory living that those before them failed to realize, and the high social costs of providing these areas with the services and facilities that are normally expected are indicative of the conditions that these studies show. Through a better general understanding of such conditions, the point was soon reached where farm leaders and others interested in improving agricultural welfare wanted to do something about them.

From the standpoint of State policy a most forward-looking step was taken in 1931 when an act was passed authorizing the purchase of submarginal agricultural land for forestry and recreational purposes. The principles thus established were that land should be acquired gradually as the State's finances permitted and as owners were willing to sell at a reforestation price per acre. This program has furnished a market for many acres of the poorer land in these areas and has enabled a number of families to start over somewhere else under more favorable conditions.

At about the same time the Department of Agricultural Economics at the New York State College of Agriculture started work on an economic classification of land for the entire State. A preliminary map was soon completed for most of the State locating the lower land classes. This was done primarily as a guide to the State purchase program, and to point out undesirable areas to those starting farming, financing the purchase of farms, and providing services and facilities to farmers. More detailed maps, including the higher land classes, are being made county by county at the rate of about two counties each year. In 1940 detailed studies had been completed in 15 counties and were under way in 6 others.

More recently, in connection with land use planning activities in New York, a special committee was set up to study further the problems of land classes I and II and develop a program designed to speed up the adjustments needed to bring about a better use of the resources provided in these areas. It has been the feeling of this planning committee and of others familiar with these areas, that public ownership may be only one of a number of uses to which the land might be well suited. It was recognized by the committee, however, that a continuation of abandonment has been the chief characteristic of land classes I and II in recent as well as earlier years (table 1).

A reconnaissance survey was proposed to provide the planning committee with more specific information as to just what has been happening in a few of these areas. It is hoped that the following information and conclusions from this survey will be helpful to the

committee and others in working out a pattern of uses which when associated together will give these lower land class areas a more worthwhile place in the economic and social structure of the regions of which they are a part.

Table 1.--Changes in occupancy of houses in land classes I and II

Land class and county	Number of occupied houses			Percent decrease
	1934	1937-39	Decrease	
Land class I:				
Chautauqua	131	88	43	33
Yates	20	11	9	45
Otsego	112	82	30	27
Cattaraugus	76	64	12	16
	339	245	94	28
Land class II:				
Chautauqua	543	503	40	7
Yates	295	269	26	9
Otsego	671	614	57	8
Cattaraugus	539	497	42	8
	2,048	1,883	165	8

Source: Thesis, An Economic Study of Land Utilization in Otsego County, New York, 1938, by Alexander Joss.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ABANDONED FARM AREAS

In 1927, studies were made in several areas throughout southern and central New York, the results of which are reported in Bulletin 490, "Abandoned Farm Areas in New York." In general these studies show that the abandoned areas are naturally low in productivity. This condition is due primarily to poor soil and a short growing season resulting from high elevations. The size and condition of buildings, the amount of livestock kept, the kind of crops grown, and the yields per acre are all evidences of this low productivity. The almost exclusive use of the cleared land for small grains, hay, and pasture, and the fact that the yields were from one-third to one-half less than State average in 1926 during a comparatively good farming period and under the management of experienced farmers is substantial evidence that cannot be overlooked (table 2). Furthermore, all facts in the history of these areas would bear out the conclusion that the present low productivity is not a new thing and that it is primarily a result of inherent inability to produce rather than soil depletion or poor management.

Much of the abandonment in these areas occurred during a period of rising prices, more than half of the farms vacant in 1927 having been vacated prior to 1920. Even with a recurrence of general economic conditions as profitable for agriculture as those during the best years

we have had it would be necessary to overlook the facts coincident with the abandonment of these farms to assume that they might be profitably reoccupied again as independent farm businesses.

Table 2.--Yield of the principal crops, 1926

Crop	Average yield per acre		
	Swale area	Smyrna area	New York State
Buckwheat (bu.)	12.4	16.2	18.9
Oats (bu.)	20.6	28.5	34.0.
Hay (tons)	0.67	0.86	1.32

Source: Bulletin 490, Abandoned Farm Areas in New York.

It was not the recent depression that put these farms out of business but rather the increasing inability of these areas to keep pace with the growing efficiency of more favored land. Such areas are not adapted to many of the improved techniques which have resulted generally in increased yields and more efficient agricultural production. Attempts by farmers to follow the intensive methods that have proved profitable on better land have served only to show that most of the land in these areas will not repay intensive operation. Neither have farmers remaining in these areas been able, up to date, to obtain adequate incomes by shifting to extensive enterprises such as sheep or beef cattle. Unless more adaptable crops are developed for such land, the economic advantages are definitely with the more productive areas. This will be equally true when more farm products are needed.

An increased amount of cash is required today for labor, building materials, equipment, feed, and seeds; and for taxes to pay for the better schools and roads; and for the automobile, radio, telephone, electric lights, washing machine, and other conveniences of the desired standard of living of these people. This increased cash is not forthcoming from the output of these farms. The alternatives would be to go without most of these things or go where they can be obtained. A large percentage of the people in these areas have apparently chosen to move elsewhere, and in general it has been possible for them to carry out their desires.

While the situation created by the play of economic forces on areas of naturally low productivity has been similar in practically all cases, namely, that of abandonment, each area takes on certain characteristics of its own. It is just as hard to find two abandoned farm areas that are alike as it is to find two farms that are alike. This fact is important when it comes to working out solutions. The two areas chosen for the reconnaissance survey in August 1940 were picked

at random. However, they effectively illustrate the differences that exist between areas in the same general agricultural region, and at the same time bring out the major trends characteristic of practically all the high-elevation areas in southern and central New York. The areas visited in 1940 were the Swale area in Steuben County and the Smyrna area in Chenango County. Both were also studied in 1927.

In the 1940 survey a reclassification of buildings was made and each occupied farm visited to determine the changes in occupancy and the kind and amount of farming being done. The following information points out the conditions that existed in 1927 and 1940, and from the comparisons shown it is possible to draw many significant conclusions.

THE SWALE AREA

The Swale area, of about 12,000 acres and at one time around 85 active farm businesses, is located in the southern part of Steuben County, south of the Canisteo River, in the towns of Canisteo and Cameron (appendix A). The center of the area is a level plateau about 2,250 feet in elevation. This plateau is poorly drained and inclined to be marshy in many spots, hence the name "Swale." A land classification map made in 1935 designates all the area as land classes I and II, i.e., land definitely not suitable for profitable farming or land of questionable value for such use.

The People

In 1927 there were 34 occupied farms in the Swale area and 49 vacant farms. The people in some of the 34 families had been there all their lives, while a number had been there less than 5 years. The average length of residence in 1927 was 17 years. In 1940 there were 18 of the 34 farms still operated by the same families and 4 by new families. The remaining 12 were vacant. There were 5 other places occupied in 1940 that were vacant in 1927. This makes a net reduction in occupancy of 7 farms for the 13-year period.

The operators of the 18 farms which had remained in the hands of the same families during the 13-year period were practically all men who had been in the area for some time, only 4 having been there less than 10 years in 1927. They were largely of English descent. A number of these families had their farms free from debt in 1927, and none of them had a debt load that would have been considered burdensome at that time. The average indebtedness per farm in 1927 was \$1,360. Based on their own estimates as to the value of their farms, stock, and tools, they had nearly an 80 percent equity in their farm businesses. All but two of these 18 farms were located in land class II areas. The other two were in land class I.

Of the 9 new residents in the area, only 2 can be considered recent arrivals. The people of one family had been on their present farm for 26 years, but happened to be away for a few years around 1927 in

connection with lumbering operations. The people of two others had been on their farm 12 years and 3 for 10 years. Only 3 of the present families on these 9 farms had moved into the area since 1929. About half of these so-called new operators were sons and sons-in-law of other operators in the area and can only be considered new in the sense that they are now operating farms on their own.

The 12 farms occupied in 1927 and now vacant were operated by two decidedly different groups in 1927. Six of these 12 had been in the Swale area less than one year when the study was made in 1927. Their average age was 36 years. They did not stay. The average length of residence of the other 6 was 17 years in 1927, and their average age was 60. When these farms were vacated because of death or for other reasons, apparently no one in the family was interested in operating them. The present use of the 12 farms is as follows: Two are occupied by the owners for short periods in the summer; 3 are now parts of occupied farms in the area; 3 are partly used by neighbors for adding to their hay supply; 2 had been deeded to the county in connection with old-age assistance and are now idle; 2 others are also completely idle and not used in any way. During the 13 years from 1927 to 1940 some of these farms were occupied off and on, but no accurate history of such occupancy was obtained. However, it was indicated that most of them had now been vacant for several years.

In August 1940 there were 106 persons living in the area on the 27 farms as compared with 115 persons on 33 farms in 1927. In both years 63 percent of the population were adults and 37 percent children. The average age of boys and girls also remained about the same. While this situation indicates only a slight reduction in total population and very little change in composition for the area as a whole, there is considerable difference in the families of the older residents when compared with those of the newer residents (tables 3 and 4).

Table 3.--The number of people on occupied farms - Swale area

People	1927 33 farms	1940 27 farms
Operator's family:		
Men	32	27
Women	27	22
Boys	20	20
Girls	19	15
Relatives	10	18
Hired help	7	4
Total	115	106

The 106 persons living in the area in 1940 were made up of 84 people in the operator's immediate family, 18 relatives, and 4 hired men. Sixty-two of these people were included in the families of the 18 older residents, and 44 were on the farms of the 9 newer residents. There were only 17 boys and girls on the 18 farms of the older residents and 22 on the 9 farms of the newer residents. In addition to there being more than twice as many children at home per family, the children of the newer residents were considerably younger. Excluding grandchildren, 12 of the 21 children on the 9 farms were under 10, whereas only 1 child fell in this age group on the 18 farms. Six of the 10 boys on the 18 farms were 20 years old and over, whereas the oldest boy on the 9 farms was 19.

Table 4.--Comparison of people on farms of the older and newer residents - Swale area - 1940

	18 farms - older residents	9 farms - newer residents
Total number of people	62	44
Average age of operators	60	48
Number of boys	10	13
Number of girls	7	9
Average age of boys	20	9
Average age of girls ...	12	10

The number of children on the various farms is explained largely by the age of operators, most of the children formerly on the 18 farms of the older residents having grown up and left. The average age of the operators on these 18 farms in 1940 was 60, or 10 years older than in 1927. This average age is reduced some by the few sons who have taken over active management of the farm. Even when all 27 farms are considered, they present an abnormal situation as to age, with 12 operators over 60 and only 3 under 40.

The average length of residence for all operators was 17 years in 1927 and 23 years in 1940. The 18 families who were there in 1927 now have a length of residence of 33 years, 16 of them having been there as operators 20 years or more. Only 3 of the 9 newer residents have been operators less than 5 years. (Additional statistical information on the people is given in Appendix B to E.)

The Buildings

The size and condition of farm buildings in the older settled areas of southern New York is a good indicator of economic productivity

of the land. Comparisons of the condition of buildings, therefore, make a good measure of the trend in growth or abandonment of an area. Such a comparison in the Swale area gives a most positive indication that the building resources are not being maintained.

In 1927 there were 53 usable houses in the area, and 34 were occupied. In 1940 there were 39 usable houses of which 27 were occupied. The percentage of occupancy was slightly higher in 1940, but even in that year nearly one-third of the usable houses were vacant (table 5).

Table 5.--Number of buildings classified as to condition -
85 farms - Swale area

Condition	Houses		Barns	
	1927	1940	1927	1940
Good	15	7	2	4
Fair	21	15	32	16
Poor	17	17	23	18
Unusable	9	9	7	7
Gone	23	37	21	40
Total	85	85	85	85

The reclassification of buildings was made without reference to the original classification except to use the same symbols and the same standards. Besides there being fewer usable houses, only half as many were classed as good and two-thirds as many as fair. The number of houses gone completely increased by 14, making a total of 37 sites on which the house is now gone.

In general the barns show even greater deterioration than the houses. There were, however, 4 barns in the area classed as good, as compared with 2 in 1927. One of these barns was entirely new, the only completely new construction in the area. There were half as many barns classed as fair and about one-fourth as many as poor. The number that were gone entirely increased by 19, making a total of 40 sites on which the barn is now gone.

The buildings on the 18 farms occupied by the older residents were better than the area average in 1927, particularly the houses, 10 of the 18 being classed as good. In 1940, 5 were still considered good, 7 fair, and 6 poor. There were fewer barns classed as good in either year, but the majority of them were considered fair. There was apparently little change between 1927 and 1940 in the condition of barns on these 18 farms. The general impression, however, was that very little was being spent for building maintenance and that actually depreciation was going on faster than the building classification would indicate. In 1927 about \$30 per farm was spent on buildings. (Additional statistical information on buildings is given in Appendix F and G.)

The Agriculture

For the area as a whole there was more livestock on the 27 farms in 1940 than on the 34 in 1927. There were 30 more cows, 115 more ewes, 3 more brood sows, but 582 fewer hens (table 6).

Table 6.--Number of productive livestock on occupied farms -
Swale area

Productive Livestock	Total number		Average Number per farm	
	34 farms - 1927	27 farms - 1940	34 farms - 1927	27 farms - 1940
Dairy cows	141	171	4.2	6.3
Ewes	16	131	0.5	4.8
Brood sows	7	10	0.2	0.3
Hens	1504	922	44.2	34.1

The most important source of farm income in the area is milk, most of which goes to the cheese factory at Woodhull. However, the dairies are small, with only 6 farms having over 10 cows. The largest dairy had 16 cows. Eight farms had less than 5 cows, and 3 had no cattle at all. The increase in dairy cows from a total of 141 to 171 was due almost entirely to an increase on the farms of the newer residents, as the size of dairy on the farms of the 18 older residents was about 6 cows in both years.

Sheep were relatively unimportant in the area. However, while only 1 farm had sheep in 1927, there were 6 farmers keeping ewes in 1940. The number ranged from 1 ewe on 1 farm to 64 on another, and the other 4 averaged about 15 ewes per farm.

Hogs as a productive enterprise would be considered even less important than sheep. There was 1 farmer with 4 brood sows, 1 with 2, and 4 with 1 each. A few pigs for home use were kept on a number of the farms.

The number of hens were considerably reduced from the number kept in 1927. The farms of the 18 older residents had only half as many, averaging 27 per farm, which means that they are kept only for home use. There were only 5 flocks of over 50 hens in the whole area, and the largest of these was 90. Apparently very little cash income would now come to this area from poultry, as it amounted to only \$53 per farm in 1927 with more hens and higher prices.

The average farm in this area in 1940 was growing nearly 6 acres of cultivated crops, about equally divided among corn, beans, and potatoes; about 4 acres of buckwheat, 1 of winter wheat, and 14 of spring

grains; and about 50 acres of hay. An analysis of individual farms, however, would indicate that this average set-up would be hard to find either as to acreage or organization. For example, corn was grown on only 12 farms; beans on 7, only 1 of which also had corn; and the winter wheat was confined to 5 farms. Potatoes were generally grown, but 3 farms reported none. However, there were but 4 farms whose potato acreage exceeded 2 acres, the largest being 6 acres. Buckwheat was grown on 15 farms, and 4 grew more than 10 acres per farm. Spring grains were grown on all but 4 farms. There were 10 farms growing over 20 acres per farm, the largest acreage being 33. Only 1 farm did not cut any hay (table 7).

Table 7.--Acres of crops grown by operators on occupied farms -
Swale area

	Total acres		Acres per farm	
	34 farms - 1926	27 farms - 1940	34 farms - 1926	27 farms - 1940
Acres in occupied farms	5,318	5,334	156.4	197.6
Acres used for crops on vacant farms ..	230	241	6.8	8.9
Corn (all kinds) ...	20	62	0.6	2.3
Potatoes	40	41	1.2	1.5
Beans (field)	21	47	0.6	1.7
Buckwheat	209	101	6.1	3.7
Spring grains	385	374	11.3	13.9
Winter wheat	4	18	0.1	0.7
Hay	1,555	1,373	45.7	50.9
Total acres of crops	2,234	2,016	65.7	74.7

When a comparison is made between the total acreage operated in 1927 and 1940, it would appear that the 27 farmers in 1940 were handling about the same acreage as the 34 did in 1927, namely, around 5,500 acres. This increased the average size of farm from 163 to 206 acres. The total acreage of crops, however, was about 200 acres less, due to a cut of 100 acres in buckwheat and 200 in hay, offset partly by increases in all other crops. The acres of crops per farm showed an increase of about 10 acres.

The cropping program of the 18 older residents apparently has changed but little in the 13-year period. While they have added more than 500 acres to their operations, there has been an increase of only about 100 acres in crops, mostly in hay.

The farmers in the area make very little use of the land on vacant farms. No attempt was made in 1940 to determine the use of

vacant farms by people living outside of the area. From observation, however, it is fairly safe to say that there has been no increase in such use and probably there is more idle land on vacant farms than formerly. In 1927 there were 2,757 acres of cleared land on the vacant farms. Of this area, 1,352 or about half was idle, 609 acres were pastured, hay was cut on 653 acres, and other crops grown on 143 acres. Most of this use was by people living outside of the area. (Additional statistical information on the agriculture of older and newer residents is given in Appendix H and I.)

The Public Services and Social Conveniences

At one time there were five schoolhouses in the Swale area. One of these was unused in 1927 and is now gone. Another was closed in 1940 and the few children located in this district were transported to Canisteo. It was reported that a third school was kept open but had only one pupil during the past year. This is verified by farm records, which show but one child of school age in this school district. A fourth school, in a section with about 12 children of school age, was the only one entirely in the area that was operating normally. The fifth school was located near the edge of the area, and its children came largely from outside.

Since 1927 a macadam road, which comes into the area from the southwest, has been constructed. It runs along the "promenade," as the road at the top of the hill through the center of the area is called, and is under construction at the southeastern corner. When completed this road will be about 6 miles long and will serve about 10 farmsteads which could be occupied. A good hard road of this type will be also of considerable value to those outside of the area who wish to farm some of the better fields on the vacant farms. This 6 miles of macadam will not mean much to other farmers in the area because in most cases their natural exit would be down the road on which they live, rather than back through the center of the area which would necessitate climbing to a higher elevation. During the winter of 1939-40 there were 6 consecutive weeks during which this macadam road was closed because of snow.

There used to be telephone service to the farms along this macadam road. About 6 years ago the line was broken down in a wind and sleet storm and has never been replaced. There is no electric line serving the area. A few farms near the edges of the area may have electric service, and some may have plants of their own. However, generally speaking, it can be said that telephones and electricity are not farm conveniences enjoyed by the people of this area.

In 1927 the average real-estate tax paid by the residents of the area was \$56 per farm, which amounts to 25 cents an acre. During the past 7 years there have been gas leases on practically all property in the area paying an average of at least 50 cents an acre annually. It can be said that this area has been free from the burden of taxes during this period, which is also the situation at the present time.

This may explain in part the annexation of about 10 vacant farms to the property already owned by the occupants of the area.

According to information obtained in regard to 14 farm transactions since 1927, the average price paid for farms in the area was about \$9 per acre. This included 6 transactions, mostly vacant farms, for less than \$5 per acre and 4 transactions involving good-sized actively operated farms, at an average of \$13 per acre. Very little cash was involved in any of these transactions. These sale prices represent considerable reduction from the values given by the people in 1927, which averaged \$19.50 per acre for occupied farms and \$17.20 per acre for vacant farms with usable buildings. The average value for all property in 1927 was \$14.90 per acre. It was assessed at \$9.20 per acre.

The church serving this area is located in the center of the area at the top of the hill. Services have not been conducted regularly for several years, but it has been opened during the summer. There is no resident pastor. In the summer of 1940 an "Old Home Day" was held on the church grounds at which 148 persons registered. Following this gathering the church was opened for three Sunday evenings, services being conducted by an outside pastor.

THE SMYRNA AREA

The Smyrna area, of about 10,000 acres and at one time about 86 active farm businesses, is located in the townships of Otselic and Smyrna, Chenango County. It is the region lying directly west of the village of Smyrna and is completely surrounded by the valleys running through Upperville, Bonney, Otselic, Otselic Center, and Beaver Meadows (appendix J). The highest point in the area is 1,970 feet above sea level. The valleys around the area range in height from 1,350 feet to 1,700 feet. A land classification map made in 1935 designates all the area as land classes I or II, i.e., land definitely not suitable for profitable farming or land of questionable value for such use.

The People

In 1927 there were 36 occupied farms in the Smyrna area and 39 vacant farms. The average length of residence of operators in 1927 was 16 years, 12 of the families having been there less than 5 years and 9 having been there over 30 years. In 1940, 7 of the 36 farms were occupied by the same families, 5 by new families, and 2 by hired men. The remaining 22 farms were vacant. However, there were 6 other places occupied in 1940 that were vacant in 1927, making a net reduction in occupancy of 16 farms for the 13-year period.

The operators of the 7 farms which had remained in the hands of the same families during the 13-year period were practically all men who had been in the area for some time. Their average age in 1940 was 62 years. Three of the 7 farms were occupied by men living alone, and practically no farming was conducted on these places.

Only 1 of the 11 new residents (excluding the hired men) had been in the area more than 5 years. Three of the 11 came from nearby farms and were the only ones who had farming experience prior to locating in the area. One man was formerly employed in a tile plant at Earlville and another was a truck driver from Norwich. The remaining 6 came from New York City and vicinity. Their previous occupations were detective, real-estate dealer, mason, factory laborer, and 2 cabinet-makers. The average age of these 11 operators was 48 years.

The 22 farms occupied in 1927 and now vacant were operated by two decidedly different groups in 1927. About half of them were operated by men who had been there an average of over 20 years and who were over 60 years of age at that time. The other half had been there only about 2 years on the average in 1927 and were mostly men in their twenties and thirties. Fourteen of these 22 vacant farms are now owned by the State, and 8 are privately owned. No attempt was made to determine the status of the 14 farms at the time they were purchased by the State. Some of them were undoubtedly vacant before they were optioned under the State purchase program. It has been the policy of the State to acquire only those properties in an area which the owners wished to sell. This program, therefore, becomes an offer to purchase when funds are available, rather than an attempt to take over an entire area at any one time.

The history of the 8 farms occupied in 1927 but now vacant and still owned by individuals gives a good illustration of the way many farms in the abandoned areas of southern and central New York are used. This historical review is based on statements obtained from neighbors and covers only what has taken place since 1927.

Farm No. 1 - 1927 occupant lives and farms about 2 miles away on a valley farm. Farm has been vacant over 10 years; land rented out to different people.

Farm No. 2 - 1927 occupant died about 1930. His boys went away to city and other farms. Present owner bought from town, which had taken farm for taxes and funeral expenses; operates farm in conjunction with his valley farm.

Farm No. 3 - 1927 occupant left for Pennsylvania about 1931, after house burned. Present owner took place and assumed mortgage; uses it for feed and pasture in conjunction with his valley farm.

Farm No. 4 - still owned by 1927 occupant; has been vacant since 1933. There are no buildings on the place; some hay is still cut; wants a price higher than State pays.

Farm No. 5 - 1927 occupant died in the spring of 1940. He was a horse-trader and did no farming; house burned in the spring of 1940; farm rented by neighbor for pasture.

Farm No. 6 - 1927 occupant died about 1928; place never farmed much even when occupied; barn has been torn down; house has been vacant since 1928, has been used some as summer home.

Farm No. 7 - 1927 occupant left in the fall of 1927; farm has been occupied most of the time since by several different families; last occupant moved away in 1939.

Farm No. 8 - 1927 occupant left shortly after 1927. Farm has been vacant and occupied alternately for several years. Last occupant committed suicide in the spring of 1940 after about 1 year's residence.

In August 1940 there were 61 persons living in the area on 18 occupied farms. This population does not include the 2 hired men who were not operating the farms on which they lived, nor 1 other family living temporarily in part of a neighbor's house. For purposes of comparison with 1927, only 18 farms will be considered in the balance of this report as occupied farms. There were 116 persons living in the same area in 1927. In both years 59 percent of the population were adults and 41 percent children (table 8).

Table 8.--The number of people on occupied farms - Smyrna area

People	1927 36 farms	1940 18 farms
Operator's family:		
Men	33	18
Women	27	13
Boys	24	15
Girls	23	9
Relatives	7	5
Partners	2	1
Total	116	61

Of the 24 children, 22 were in the families of those who had come into the area since 1927. Fifteen children were located on 3 farms. There were no children on 8 farms. Most of the girls in the area were young, only one being over 12. There were 5 boys above 15 years.

The average age of operators was about 4 years more in 1940 than in 1927. While there were about the same proportion who were 60 years and over, there was a smaller proportion in 1940 under 40 years of age. The average age of operators in 1940 was 53 years.

The length of residence was shorter on the average for the 18 operators in 1940 than for the 36 operators there in 1927. In other words, the short length of residence of the 11 new families who had come in since 1927 more than offset the longer residence of the 7 families who were there in both 1927 and 1940. The average length of residence for the 1940 operators was 12 years and for the 1927 operators 16 years. (Additional statistical information on the people is given in Appendix K to M.)

The Buildings

A 1927-40 comparison of the condition of buildings in the Smyrna area, the same as in the Swale area, gives a most positive indication that the building resources are not being maintained. In 1927 there were 61 usable houses in the area, and 36 were occupied. In 1940 there were 26 usable houses of which 20 were occupied. Nearly all of the usable houses were occupied in 1940, while only slightly over half were used in 1927 (table 9).

Table 9.--Number of buildings classified as to condition -
86 farms - Smyrna area

Condition	Houses		Barns	
	1927	1940	1927	1940
Good	10	7	3	2
Fair	23	8	11	13
Poor	28	11	48	14
Unusable	6	9	4	0
Gone	19	51	20	57
Total	86	86	86	86

The big decrease in the number of usable houses in this 13-year period can be attributed only partly to State purchase, even if we assume that the 1927 buildings were all standing when the State took some of these farms over. According to the building classification in 1927, there were 2 good houses, 7 fair houses, 10 poor houses, and 2 unusable houses at that time on land now owned by the State. All buildings on State-owned land are disposed of, but as some of these 21 houses were undoubtedly gone at the time of State purchase it may be assumed that at least half of the 32 fewer houses disappeared for other reasons than State purchase.

There were 2 good barns, 4 fair barns, 18 poor barns, and 3 unusable barns in 1927 on property now owned by the State. The large number of poor barns in this area in 1927 is a good indicator of the low return from farming at that time. The number of poor barns has now been reduced to a point where a goodly proportion of the barns that are left are in fair condition. There are but one house and one barn in the area of completely new construction. They are on the same farm. (Additional statistical information on buildings is given in Appendix O.)

The Agriculture

With only half as many farms occupied in 1940 as in 1927, at least a 50 percent drop in livestock numbers might be expected. However, there were considerably fewer than half as many cows and only about one-fourth as many hens. Sheep in the area included 19 ewes on one farm in 1940 as compared with 188 ewes on 6 farms in 1927. There were 10 brood sows in the area in 1927 and only 2 in 1940 (table 10).

Table 10.--Number of productive livestock on occupied farms -
Smyrna area

Productive livestock	Total number		Average number per farm	
	36 farms - 1927	18 farms - 1940	36 farms - 1927	18 farms - 1940
Dairy cows	218	93	6.1	5.2
Ewes	188	19	5.2	1.0
Brood sows	10	2	0.3	0.1
Hens	2241	622	62.2	34.5

Only 5 farms in the area had dairies of any size, and 75 of the 93 cows were on these 5 farms. On 5 other farms no cows were kept. Only one of the 11 new residents had developed a dairy of more than 4 cows. All farms in this area were within 3 miles of milk routes traveling the hard roads which completely surround the area.

The total number of hens in the area was reduced to about one-fourth of what it was in 1927, and the number per farm dropped from 62 to 34. Even this average number was raised considerably by 3 farmers who had from 100 to 175 birds. The next largest flock was 45. On 5 farms no hens were kept. Most of the cows and hens were on the farms of the 7 older residents.

The crops grown in this area were extremely variable between farms. For example, corn was grown on only 8 farms, and 3 of these accounted for 23 of the 32 acres in the area. Potatoes were grown on 11 of the 18 farms, usually 1 acre or less.

All the 126 acres of market peas and market beans were on 4 farms. These 2 crops are new to the area in the last 5 years and practically all of the acreage is confined to a small section in the eastern part of the area near Smyrna. These crops are grown on shares for dealers who arrange for the seed and fertilizer and handle the picking and marketing. The farmer furnishes the land, grows the crop, and agrees to pay half the seed, fertilizer, and picking costs. These are speculative crops and are limited to the better fields on a small number of farms.

Only 2 farms grew buckwheat, and spring grains were harvested on only 6 farms. There were 5 farms on which no hay was cut. The average acreage of hay for all farms was 26 acres.

There was practically no change in the average size of farm in this area, which was about 130 acres in both years. Some farmers added acreage, and others reduced the size of their farms by selling part to the State. The acreage of crops per farm was a little higher in 1940 than in 1927, but this was more than accounted for by the added acreage of beans and peas grown on shares (table 11).

Table 11.--Acres of crops grown by operators on occupied farms - Smyrna area

	Total acres		Acres per farm	
	36 farms - 1926	18 farms - 1940	36 farms - 1926	18 farms - 1940
Acres in occupied farms	4,661	2,369	129.5	131.6
Corn	24	32	.7	1.8
Potatoes	24	11	.7	.6
Beans	--	70	--	3.9
Peas	--	56	--	3.1
Buckwheat	80	13	2.2	.7
Spring grains	114	60	3.2	3.3
Hay	976	471	27.0	26.2
All other	6	8	.2	.4
Total acres of crops	1,224	721	34.0	40.0

Most of the hay and grain was grown on the farms of the 7 older residents. All the market beans and market peas were grown on the farms of the newer residents. (Additional statistical information on the agriculture of the older and newer residents is given in Appendix P.)

The Public Services and Social Conveniences

There are two schoolhouses, but one of these is near the edge of the area and includes some outside territory. Most of the farms are in school districts whose schoolhouses are located outside the area. The property in the area lies in parts of 10 different school districts. Most of the social and community life of this area is external, rather than internal. It is an area only from the standpoint of physical characteristics. The community centers for these people lie in the valleys outside of the area.

There are no macadam roads in the area, but the dirt and gravel roads are mostly in good condition. There is a Forestry Experiment Station now located in the center of the area, and some roads have been improved in connection with its operation and that of the various State-owned parcels scattered over the area. The farms in this area are quite accessible to hard roads in the nearby valleys, which are at relatively high elevations also. No attempt, however, is apparently made in the winter to keep all roads in the area open, and many of the residents find themselves isolated during periods of heavy snowfall.

In 1927 the average real-estate tax paid by the residents of the area was 44 cents per acre. As far as individuals were concerned, however, the tax might have run anywhere from 28 cents to 68 cents an acre, depending on location of town and school district.

Ten of the eleven newer occupants bought their farms outright when they came into the area. A total of \$7,030, or about \$700 per farm, was the purchase price for these 10 farms, 6 of which were paid for in cash and the other 4 purchased on contract with nothing down. The price of the 6 farms bought for cash was \$10 per acre. They were all considerably smaller farms than the average in the area, running from 51 to 121 and averaging 78 acres. The purchase price of the 4 farms sold on contract was \$4.50 per acre. Except for one place of 10 acres they were larger farms, averaging 170 acres per farm.

Only part of the cash brought into an area of this kind from outside sources is shown by the initial purchase payments. Between 1927 and 1940, there were four farms bought and resettled in the Smyrna area on which a total of over \$30,000 of outside money has been invested, about \$7,500 per farm. Less than 20 percent of this amount was required for the original purchase price of the farms. The balance went into building up the soil, construction of buildings, and accumulation of stock and tools. This illustration is not typical of all farms purchased, because many people put all the cash they have into the purchase price and have nothing with which to operate. The illustration is representative, however, of the fact that all the money available usually goes into one of these farms sooner or later irrespective of the initial investment.

DIFFERENCES IN AREAS

The original size of farms in the two areas was about the same. There was about 10,000 acres in each area devoted to farming and there were originally 85 building sites in the Swale area and 86 in Smyrna. In 1927 the 34 occupied farms in the Swale area averaged 156 acres in size, and the 36 occupied farms in the Smyrna area averaged 130 acres. By 1940 the average size of the 27 occupied farms in the Swale area had increased still further to 198 acres, while the size of the 18 occupied farms in the Smyrna area remained practically the same as in 1927, averaging 132 acres. The vacant farms in the Swale area in 1927 were only about half the size of the occupied farms, while in Smyrna the occupied and vacant farms were practically the same in size. Apparently in the Swale area there has been a tendency for the older residents to add to their farm acreage over a period of years, whereas in Smyrna the farm units have tended to remain about the same in acreage.

In 1940 the families living in the Swale area were largely those who had been in the area for some time or those who had come to the area from nearby farms. Very few families had moved into the area during the depression, and very little outside capital had been invested in the area since 1927. In Smyrna over one-half of the 1940 occupants were new to the area, having come into it since the depression, bringing considerable capital with them and having very little previous farming experience. Most of them came from nonagricultural employment and half of them from metropolitan areas.

In the Swale area most of the new families coming into the area since 1927 were actively engaged in farming and added considerably to

the agricultural output of the area. In Smyrna, very few of the new families were farming actively and the general impression was that other alternatives might easily attract them away. Apparently many more people had been in and out of the Smyrna area in the last 13 years than was the case in the Swale area.

Less dairying was being practiced in the Smyrna area than in the Swale, in spite of the fact that the former has access to fluid milk plants while the latter is located in a cream and cheese territory. The number of cows per farm decreased in the Smyrna area between 1927 and 1940 and increased in the Swale area. The trend in sheep and hog production was also opposite in the two areas. In the Swale area one farmer kept sheep in 1927 and 6 in 1940. In the Smyrna area 6 farmers kept sheep in 1927 and only one in 1940. There were a few more brood sows in the Swale area in 1940 than in 1927 and a few less in the Smyrna area. The trend in poultry production was decidedly downward in both areas but particularly so in the Smyrna area.

The accessibility of the two areas in relation to the surrounding agriculture and villages is also a factor of some significance. The difference in elevation between the valley roads surrounding the Swale area and the plateau at the top of the hill is over 1,000 feet for the roads to the north and from 500 to 600 feet for the roads to the south of the area. On the other hand, there are parts of the Smyrna area that have an elevation lower than some of the macadam roads surrounding the area. However, in general the Smyrna area is higher, but the rises in elevation of 300 to 400 feet on many of the roads are more gradual than those found in most other similar areas of southern New York.

Judging from what has actually happened, one might say that the greater accessibility of the Smyrna area has tended to speed up abandonment rather than delay it. This may be the usual situation in areas of low productivity. The fact that the community centers for the residents of the Smyrna area are all outside of the area might also be a factor. The Swale area at one time and to a certain extent today has a community center of its own located at the top of the hill in the center of the area. Many of its social activities would tend to bring the residents together, whereas similar activities in the Smyrna area would cause them to mingle almost entirely with people from outside the area.

The accessibility of an abandoned farm area and the nature of the farm businesses practiced on the nearby farms may have considerable bearing on the way in which the land in such an area is used by the farmers outside the area. While no attempt was made in 1940 to obtain information as to the use of vacant farms by outside operators, some indication is given in the disposal of farms occupied in 1927 but now vacant. In the Swale area there was no evidence that any of these farms became parts of operating units outside the area, whereas in the Smyrna area half of such farms are now owned by operators of valley farms. The impression obtained in the Smyrna area was that a high proportion of the available vacant farms were being used for hay and pasture by nearby farmers.

There are many other points in which these two areas differ. However, probably enough has already been said, as the main reason for this section of the report is merely to develop the thought that a careful analysis of the characteristics of each area is desirable before going too far in the application of general recommendations. The courses followed by these areas are certainly the result of a combination of factors which have varying weights of influence for each area.

In conclusion, mention should be made of another important factor common to all areas, but which varies considerably between areas and within areas, namely, the matter of taxes and the services received for taxes. The average real-estate tax in 1927 was 25 cents an acre in the Swale area and 44 cents an acre in the Smyrna area. No information was obtained as to changes since that time. For several years the Swale area has had an income of about 50 cents an acre from gas leases. This factor undoubtedly has helped the property owners and delayed abandonment. For several years the State land-purchase program in the Smyrna area has helped some owners to dispose of their property and has undoubtedly speeded up the process of abandonment. Up to date there has been no State purchase of land in the Swale area.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

The following comments are made as an evaluation of the situation and some of its ramifications as seen by the writers.

If the people now on the farms of these areas are not reasonably well satisfied with life under the conditions of their area, they will look for better alternatives. That such alternatives are available and can be obtained is indicated by the fact that there has been continued abandonment in these and many other poor-land areas in spite of economic depressions. This is progress and should not be discouraged.

There are some people, however, who because of the equity they have in their farms, or because of age, or who for other good reasons feel justifiably that they are as well off on these farms as they would be anywhere else. Assistance in better farming and better living should be given these people the same as people in any other location. Such assistance should recognize the limitations of these farms and in some instances of the people on them. Many of these people are there today because they have adopted standards that go with the potentialities of their environment. They are going without certain things which experience has shown them they could not pay for. Their system of farming is a conservative one involving a minimum of cash expense. They rely on getting much of their living from the farm. Assistance should consist largely in helping them to do a better job along the lines that they are now following.

Subsidizing these poor areas with hard surface roads and electric lines would undoubtedly do more harm than good from the standpoint of helping the people as farmers. Such services, even if made available

at public expense, tend to run up cash expenses for the equipment essential to take advantage of them. Anything which adds cash expenses that cannot be offset by cash income would tend to speed up abandonment or cause a shift away from farming and toward off-farm employment. In many areas, of course, such courses might be desirable from a public standpoint.

A second element that should be considered in a program for these areas is guidance to people who may wish to purchase farms in these areas. It appears generally impossible under present conditions for persons to buy, operate, and pay for typical farms in these areas and at the same time maintain an acceptable level of living. If this is true everything possible should be done to prevent uninformed persons from spending their former earnings and the better part of their lives in attempting to prove that it can be done. The educational program on getting a better understanding of the various land classes in the State is a real step in this direction. It may be that some form of zoning should be considered. In the long run, however, probably one of the best ways to avoid the perpetuation of these areas as farm real estate "paradises" would be to get them into uses which would make the various properties wanted by their owners. This brings us to the last and third point.

There is need for the development of a definite program designed to result in a pattern of uses which when associated will give these areas a permanent and worth-while place in the economic and social structure of the regions of which they are a part. Because of the large amount of land in these areas which seems to be better adapted to forestry and recreation than to farming or homes, it is quite likely that this pattern of uses would involve both private and public ownership. Therefore, some of the questions that will need to be answered are: What part of these areas should be returned to public ownership? To what uses should the publicly owned areas be put? What relationships should exist between public and private ownership in the same area?

One approach to determining the amount of public ownership needed would be to consider first the various possibilities of private ownership and uses, on the assumption that if a pattern of such uses can be developed it would not be necessary to turn to public ownership for any large part of these areas.

Because of the wide variations in soil conditions between the farms of southern New York, good farms can be found in poor areas and poor farms can be found in good areas. Near the edges of some of these abandoned farm areas, or along certain roads a group of farms is often found that have greater possibilities than others in the area. Such farms may under conservative operation remain in farming or part-time farming for many years to come. In encouraging a continuation of farming on the better farms of the poorer areas, it should be pointed out that there will of necessity be many services and social advantages that cannot go with them. Often, however, the intermingling of rural residences, part-time farms, and summer homes with

a few full-time farms will give a community enough people and purchasing power to command the services and conveniences desired.

Another avenue of private ownership which has real possibilities in many areas is the inclusion of some of these farms in the farm businesses of operators living outside of the area. Many valley farms in an attempt to enlarge their operations find that they can use additional crops, pasture, or woodland to real advantage. Much of the cheap land in poor areas takes on a different significance when there is a possibility of attaching it to better land and operating it all as one unit. The truck, the rubber-tired tractor, and better roads are making it more practicable to farm noncontiguous fields under one management. In general, such use would not require buildings. The houses and barns would undoubtedly continue to deteriorate, and their disappearance might insure the continuation of such farms as parts of units whose headquarters are located more advantageously for year-round living.

Private forestry in these areas is a use that might also be given further study and analysis. Small tracts might be owned by farmers not only as farm wood lots for home use, but for the major purpose of producing salable timber. Also local lumbermen and other businessmen might also wish to invest in such forest property if a system could be worked out that would insure a fair return on investment over a period of years. Encouragement along this line undoubtedly rests on some revision in tax policies for woodland, a greater use of certain provisions already available, and on the outcome of some of the present experiments in cooperative marketing of forest products and the establishment of local wood-using industries.

A trend toward many of these private uses is now under way. Planning committees can make a real contribution in guiding these developments. Each area calls for special analysis and the development of a positive long-time policy which will enable the current programs of action agencies to contribute more effectively toward the final results desired.

In conjunction with a program for guiding and developing private uses for the land in these areas should go a public land purchase program for those parts of these areas which have no better alternative use. There are many uses to which such land can be put, such as parks and recreation areas, game refuges, and timber production. Programs and uses for these publicly owned areas should also be carefully worked out and where possible employment provided for people living near the areas.

The best way to prevent a misuse of land is to get it into the uses for which it is best adapted.

APPENDIX

- A. Map - The Swale area - 1940.
- B. Number of people on occupied farms - Swale area.
- C. Number of operators by age groups - Swale area.
- D. Number of operators grouped by length of residence - Swale area.
- E. Number and ages of children living on occupied farms - Swale area.
- F. Change in condition of buildings - Swale area.
- G. Number of buildings on 18 farms of older residents classified as to condition - Swale area.
- H. Number of productive livestock on 18 farms of older residents - Swale area.
- I. Acres of crops grown by operators of the 18 farms of older residents - Swale area.
- J. Map - The Smyrna area - 1940.
- K. Number of people on occupied farms - Smyrna area.
- L. Number and ages of children living on occupied farms - Smyrna area.
- M. Number of operators by age groups - Smyrna area.
- N. Number of operators grouped by length of residence - Smyrna area.
- O. Changes in condition of buildings - Smyrna area.
- P. Comparison of older residents with newer residents - Smyrna area.

Canister



vacant	-	A good
A-good	-	B fair
B-fair	-	C poor
C-poor	-	

Scale 1 inch = 1 mile

Campana

B. Number of people on occupied farms - Swale area

People	1927	1940	1940	
	33 farms	27 farms	18 farms, older residents	9 farms, newer residents
Operators:				
Men	32	27	19	8
Women	27	22	13	9
Children at home in operator's family:				
Boys	20	20	8	12
Girls	19	15	6	9
Relatives:				
Fathers, mothers and uncles	4	7	5	2
Brothers and sisters	5	2	2	0
Married sons, daughters and nephews not working on farm	0	5	3	2
Grandchildren	1	4	3	1
Hired help:				
Men	3	4	3	1
Wives	1	0	0	0
Children	3	0	0	0
Total	115	106	62	44

C. Number of operators by age groups - Swale area

Ages of operators	1927	1940	1940	
	33 farms	27 farms	18 farms, older residents	9 farms, newer residents
Under 40 years	8	3	0	3
40-59	17	12	8	4
60 and over	8	12	10	2
Average age	50	56	60	48

D. Number of operators grouped by length of residence - Swale area

Length of residence as operators	1927	1940	1940	
	33 farms	27 farms	18 farms, older residents	9 farms, newer residents
Under 5 years	9	3	0	3
5-9	5	0	0	0
10-19	8	7	2	5
20-29	5	8	7	1
30 and over	6	9	9	0
Average length of residence as operators (years)	17	23	33	9

E. Number and ages of children living on occupied farms - Swale area

Ages	1927	1940	1940	
	33 farms	27 farms	18 farms, older residents	9 farms, newer residents
Boys:				
Under 10	6	9	1	8
10-14	4	2	1	1
15-19	7	6	2	4
20 and over	5	6	6	0
Total	22	23	10	13
Girls:				
Under 10	10	7	2	5
10-14	7	3	2	1
15-19	2	5	3	2
20 and over	2	1	0	1
Total	21	16	7	9
Average age:				
Boys	15	14	20	9
Girls	11	11	12	10

F. Change in Condition of buildings - Swale area

Houses		Barns	
Number and condition		Number and condition	
1927	1940	1927	1940
15 good	6 good 7 fair 2 poor	2 good	2 good
21 fair	1 good 7 fair 7 poor 3 unusable 3 gone	32 fair	1 good 13 fair 9 poor 1 unusable 8 gone
17 poor	1 fair 8 poor 3 unusable 5 gone	23 poor	1 good (new) 3 fair 9 poor 3 unusable 7 gone
9 unusable	3 unusable 6 gone	7 unusable	3 unusable 4 gone

G. Number of buildings on 18 farms of older residents classified as to condition - Swale area

Condition	Houses		Barns	
	1927	1940	1927	1940
Good	10	5	2	3
Fair	4	7	11	10
Poor	4	6	4	4
Unusable	0	0	1	0
Gone	0	0	0	1

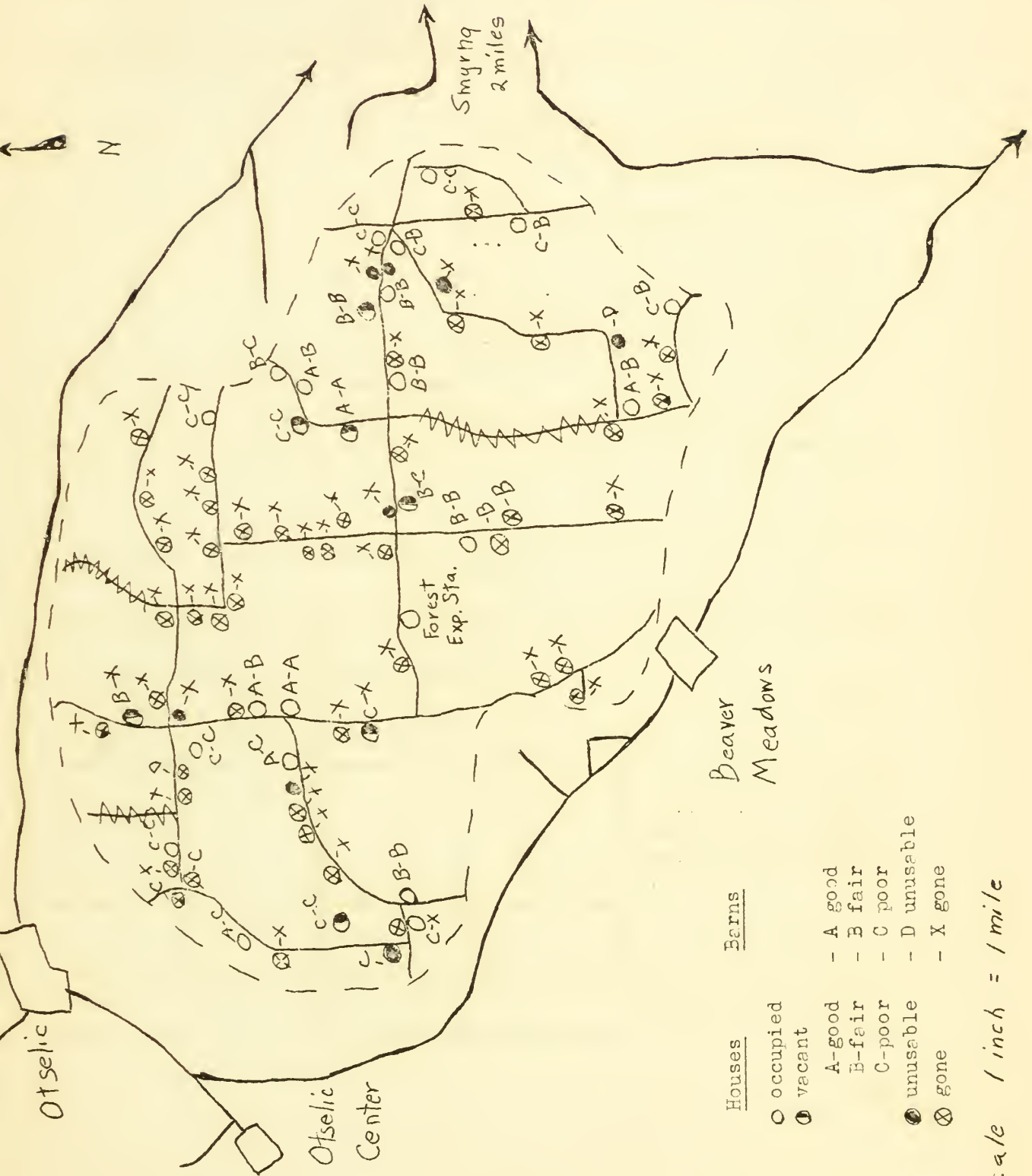
H. Number of productive livestock on 18 farms of older residents -
Swale area

Productive livestock	Total number		Average per farm	
	1927	1940	1927	1940
Dairy cows	101	105	5.6	5.8
Ewes	16	30	0.9	1.7
Brood sows	6	8	0.3	0.4
Hens	968	491	53.8	27.3

I. Acres of crops grown by operators of the 18 farms of older
residents - Swale area

	Total acres		Average per farm	
	1926	1940	1926	1940
Acres in occupied farms	3,081	3,611	171.2	200.6
Acres used for crops on vacant farms	210	225	11.7	12.5
Corn	12	37	0.7	2.1
Potatoes	26	32	1.4	1.8
Beans	16	26	0.9	1.4
Buckwheat	131	83	7.3	4.6
Spring grains	234	272	13.0	15.1
Winter wheat	4	15	0.2	0.8
Hay	1,004	1,096	55.8	60.9
Total acres of crops	1,427	1,561	79.3	86.7

J. SMYRNA AREA - 1940



Scale 1 inch = 1 mile

K. Number of people on occupied farms - Smyrna area

People	36 farms - 1927	18 farms - 1940
Operators:		
Men	33	18
Women	27	13
Children at home in operator's family:		
Boys	24	15
Girls	23	9
Others:		
Fathers and mothers	5	3
Son's wife and child	0	2
Nephew and wife	2	0
Partners	2	1
Total	116	61

L. Number and ages of children living on occupied farms - Smyrna area

Ages	Boys		Girls	
	36 farms - 1927	18 farms - 1940	36 farms - 1927	18 farms - 1940
Under 10	12	3	12	5
10-14	6	7	7	3
15-19	3	2	4	1
20 and over	3	3	0	0
Total	24	15	23	9
Average age	11	15	9	8

M. Number of operators by age groups - Smyrna area

Age of operators	28 farms - 1927	18 farms - 1940
Under 40	9	4
40-59	7	6
60 and over	12	8
Total	28	18
Average age	49	53

N. Number of operators grouped by length of residence -
Smyrna area

Years	34 farms - 1927	18 farms - 1940
Under 5	12	4
5-9	6	7
10-19	6	2
20-29	1	3
30 and over	9	2
Total	34	18
Average years of residence ..	16	12

O. Changes in condition of buildings - Smyrna area

Houses		Barns	
Number and condition		Number and condition	
1927	1940	1927	1940
10 good	3 good 2 fair 2 poor 1 gone 2 gone (State)	3 good	1 good - - - 2 gone (State)
23 fair	3 good 4 fair 4 poor 1 unusable 4 gone 7 gone (State)	11 fair	- 6 fair - - 1 gone 4 gone (State)
28 poor	1 good (new) 2 fair 5 poor 6 unusable 4 gone 10 gone (State)	48 poor	1 good (new) 7 fair 14 poor - 8 gone 18 gone (State)
6 unusable	2 unusable 2 gone 2 gone (State)	4 unusable	- 1 gone 3 gone (State)

P. Comparison of older residents with newer residents - Smyrna area

Item	Area totals and averages		Average per farm	
	7 farms, older residents	11 farms, newer residents	7 farms, older residents	11 farms newer residents
Age of operators	62	48	-	-
Years of residence ..	24	4	-	-
Number of:				
Children	2	22	-	-
Cows	67	26	9.6	2.4
Hens	412	210	58.9	19.1
Acres of:				
Corn	18	14	2.6	1.3
Potatoes	3	8	.4	.7
Beans	-	70	-	6.4
Peas	-	56	-	5.1
Buckwheat	13	-	1.8	-
Spring grains	33	27	4.7	2.4
Hay	272	191	38.8	17.4

Some Trends in Land Classes I and II:
An Analysis of Two Areas in Southern New York

L. M. Vaughan and M. S. Parsons



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EXTENSION SERVICE

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